

The school had two rooms, and two teachers. The grades were divided into two or three grades, “approximately grades 1 to 3 and 3 to 5.” The children sat on benches, sitting “two at a time” (two children to a bench). She said the benches had desks on the front and, “It was all attached. You could put your books on it and write on the desk.”

Willie said the school had a heater in each of the two rooms. The heater itself was tall and made of iron. The wood was put in it through a door in the front. The door was about five inches tall. The stove had a damper so you could smother the fire down but still keep the room warm. A pipe went from the stove up to a hole in the wall. Willie said the heater itself was called a “pot belly” stove. She said there was a room to put the wood for the stove in, and it “was like a closet.”

Willie explained that the wood for the stove was cut to about one-foot lengths. Her parents cut wood and took it to the school to help keep heat. It was *cold* in the winter. Other parents did the same. Willie said she was always a “tomboy,” so she helped her brothers take in and stack the wood.

School hours were from 8:00 to 3:00. Willie said some children had to work more and didn’t get to school too regularly. When asked about when school was in session, Willie said when their crops came in they didn’t go to school. They got up when the sun rose and went out to the field to pick cotton.

Percy Joiner’s House

Willie said before she was born, her father lived in the house where she grew up, but he bought it after she was born. She described the construction as overlapping boards. It had a tin roof. Two rooms were in front and two rooms were in back. The kitchen was one of the back rooms. Willie remembered the house once had three rooms, but the fourth was added when more children came. Behind the house, they had a chicken house but no smoke house.

Daily Life

Picking Cotton. The families and all the children would get together and pick cotton. It took about 1200 pounds to make a bale. They were paid by the bale weight. In the 1920s and 1930s and maybe beyond that, a bale brought from 200 to 300 dollars. They took the cotton to town to sell it.

She said that when her family picked cotton, she’d go to the house and get a baked sweet potato. Baked sweet potatoes were sent to the field to eat. Willie commented: “When there was strips in the cotton, we’d go out there and plant black-eyed peas in the field. Later we’d strip the peas and put them in fruit jars.”